

The syntax of focus, wh-phrases, and neg-words in Georgian

Lena Borise

Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics | lena.borise@nytud.hu

10 June 2021 | OLINCO

What this talk is about:

Color-coding:

wh-phrase

narrow focus

neg-word

verb

- (1) a. გუშინ დილას ბებია რას ალაგებდა?
Gušin dila-s bebia ra-s a-lag-eb-d-a?
yesterday morning-DAT grandma.NOM what-DAT VER-clean-SF-SM-IPFV.3SG
‘What did grandma clean yesterday morning?’

b. **Gušin dilas ras bebia alagebda?*

- c. გუშინ დილას ბებია სამზარეულოს ალაგებდა.
Gušin dila-s bebia samzareulo-s a-lag-eb-d-a.
yesterday morning-DAT grandma.NOM kitchen-DAT VER-clean-SF-SM-IPFV.3SG
‘Grandma cleaned THE KITCHEN yesterday morning.’

d. **Gušin dilas samzareulos bebia alagebda.*

Immediately preverbal position = IPrP

Types of focus discussed here

- Narrow foci found in **replies to wh-questions (WHQs)**
- **Contrastive** foci found in corrective replies
- Constituents modified by **focus-inducing particles**, such as *only & even*

Verb-final languages with preverbal focus

- Basque (Hualde et al. 1994, Arregi 2002; Elordieta 2001; Ortiz de Urbina 2002)
- Chechen (Komen 2007)
- E. Armenian (Comrie 1984; Dum-Tragut 2009; Megerdooonian & Ganjavi 2009)
- Gujarati (Kim 1988; Desai 2018)
- Hindi (Mahajan 1990; Dayal 1996; Kidwai 2000; Manetta 2010)
- Ingush (Nichols 2011)
- Kashmiri (Bhatt 1999; Munshi & Bhatt 2009; Manetta 2011)
- Malayalam (Jayaseelan 1996; 2001; 2003)
- Ossetic (Abaev 1939; Erschler 2008; 2012; Lyutikova & Tatevosov 2009)
- Persian (Kahnemuyipour 2001; Toosarvandani 2008; Karimi 2008; Megerdooonian & Ganjavi 2009)
- Turkish (Erguvanlı 1984; Erku 1983; Göksel & Özsoy 2000; İşsever 2003; Öztürk 2004; Şener 2010; Kamali 2011)
- etc.

Sneak peek at the conclusions

Adjacency between the elements in the IPrP and the verb, in a single language (Georgian), relies on **different syntactic strategies**:

- movement (for wh-phrases)
- in-situ placement (for preverbal narrow foci).

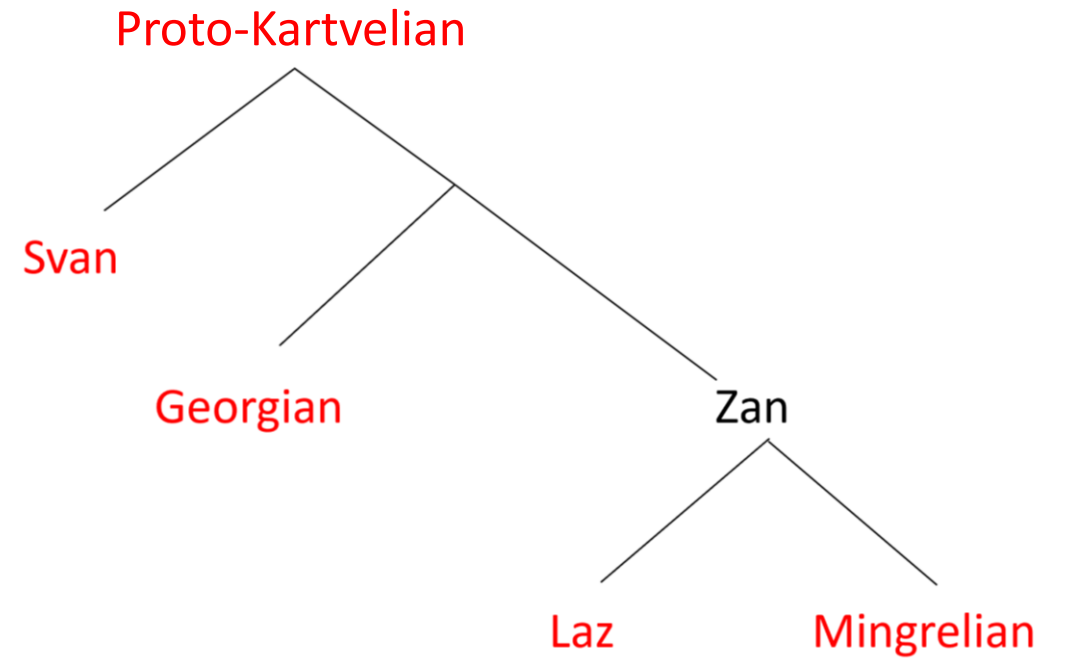
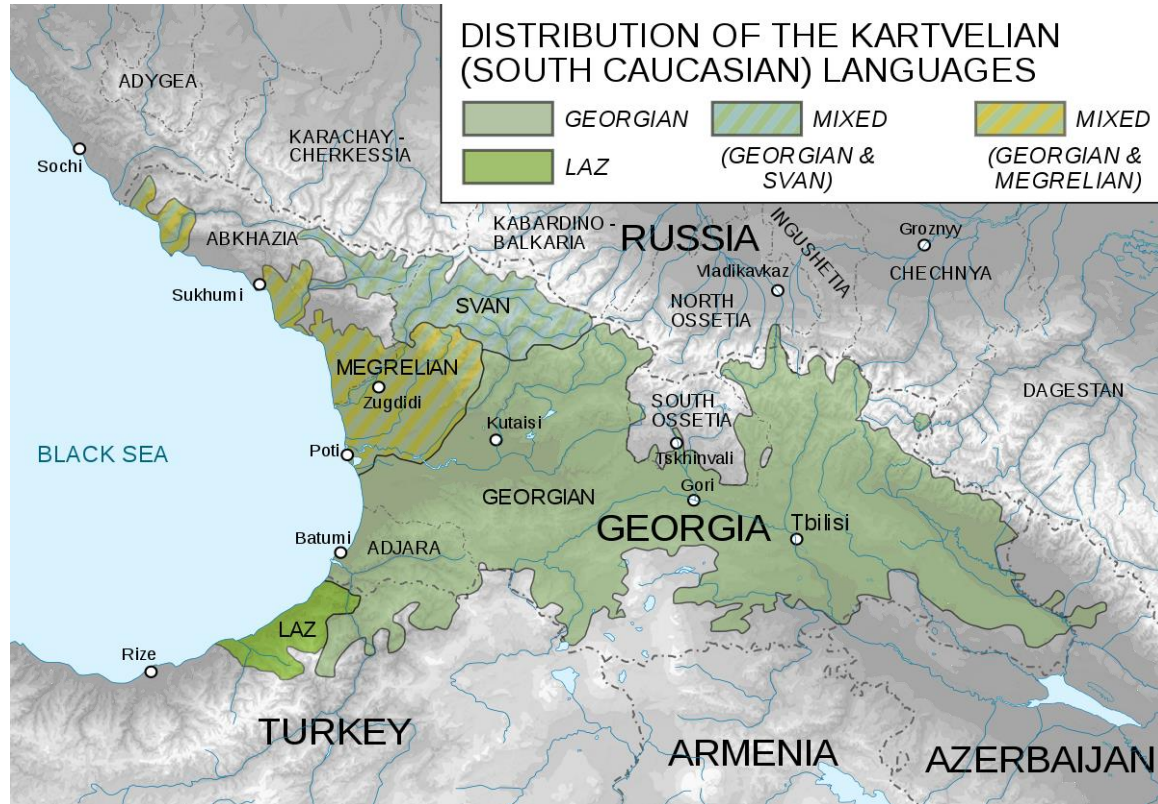
Why is this important?

- What is described as ‘preverbal focus’ is not a unified phenomenon
- Rather, preverbal focus placement results from different syntactic operations that happen to have the same output.

Roadmap

1. **Georgian: the basics**
2. **Focus-verb adjacency: the basics**
3. **Syntax of wh/focus**
 - i. Neg-words as a diagnostic
 - ii. Wh-phrases
 - iii. Preverbal foci

Georgian: the basics



Georgian: the basics

- Underlyingly **OV**, but **VO** possible & common in broad focus contexts (Pochkhua 1962; Aronson 1982; Skopeteas & Fanselow 2010)
- In neutral **OV** declaratives, the **verb** stays in situ (Borise & Polinsky 2018; see also Han, Lidz & Musolino 2007; Simpson & Syed 2014; Shibata 2015)
- Neutral **VO** is derived via short, semantically vacuous verb-movement over the object (Skopeteas & Fanselow 2010; Borise 2019)

Georgian: the basics

- Smaller phrases (DPs, PPs) are **head-final**
- Initial complementizers, clause-medial modals \Rightarrow clausal spine is **head-initial** above the VP (cf. Germanic, Haider 2010; *modulo* V2)
- No obligatory movement of **subjects** to Spec, TP
- Case assignment in situ (Legate 2008; Nash 2017; Thivierge 2019)

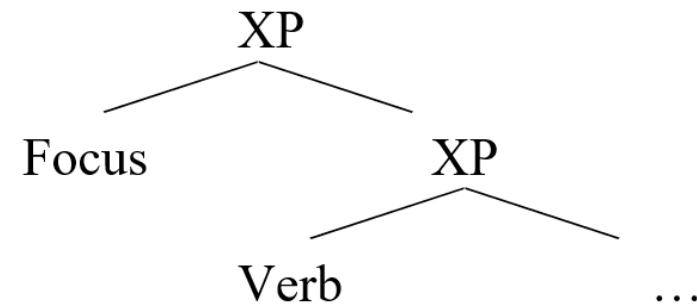
- **Split-active** case marking: **nominative** in present (NOM, DAT), **active** in aorist and perfect (ERG, NOM)
- **Agreement**: subject, direct object, indirect object + extensive pro-drop

Two strategies for focus-verb adjacency

Spec-Head configuration: focal/wh-element A-bar moves to Spec, XP and the verb raises to X⁰, thereby creating adjacency.

The XP may be found at different heights in the clause:

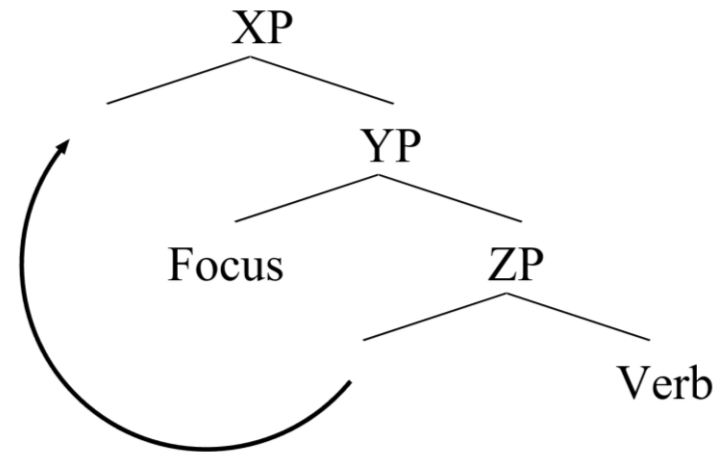
- CP-layer (Kashmiri; Bhatt 1999)
- TP-layer (Persian; Karimi 2008)
- vP-layer (Malayalam; Jayaseelan 2001)



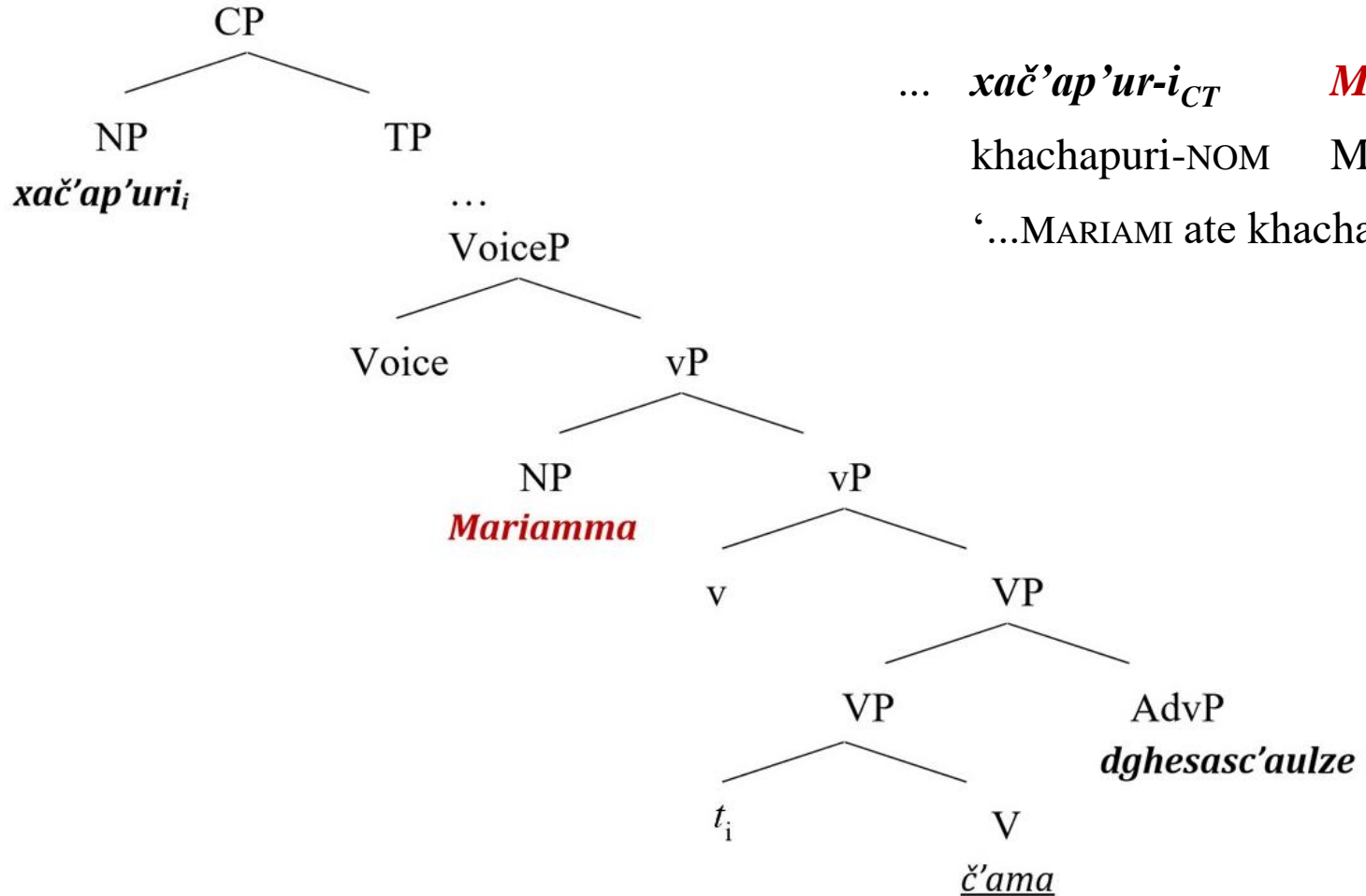
Two strategies for focus-verb adjacency

In-situ interpretation + movement of intervening material ('altruistic movement'): focus-verb adjacency is a by-product of the movement of the material that would otherwise intervene between the focus and the verb to the right or left periphery:

- Basque (Arregi 2002)
- Romance (Zubizarreta 1998)
- Zulu (IAV; Cheng & Downing 2012)



Left-peripheral topics



... *xač'ap'ur-i*_{CT} *Mariam-ma*_F *č'am-a* *dghesasc'aul-ze*.
 khachapuri-NOM M.-ERG at-AOR.3SG party-at
 '...MARIAMI ate khachapuri at the party.'

Topic > Focus

Left periphery: exceptions

Certain types of constituents **cannot be displaced** into the left periphery:

- Non-specific indefinites
- N(eg)-words

Exceptions: non-specific indefinites

(5) A: **Nebismier* *matarebel-s*_{CT} *vin* *ga-h-q'v-eb-a?*
any train-DAT who PRV-3-follow-SF-3SG
(‘Who would take any train?’)

B: **Nebismier* *matarebel-s*_{CT} *Giorg-i*_F *ga-h-q'v-eb-a.*
any train-DAT G.-NOM PRV-3-follow-SF-3SG
(‘GIORGI would take any train.’)

(6) A: **Rame*_{CT} *vin* *i-p'ov-a* *sxven-ši?*
something who VER-find-AOR.3SG attic-in
(‘Who found something in the attic?’)

B: **Rame*_{CT} *Marik'a-m*_F *i-p'ov-a* *sxven-ši.*
something M.-ERG VER-find-AOR.3SG attic-in
(‘MARIKA found something in the attic.’)

Exceptions: neg-words

(7) ('Who ate nothing?')

* *Ara-per-i*_{CT} *Mariam-ma*_F (ar) č'am-a.
NEG-thing-NOM M.-ERG NEG eat-AOR.3SG

('MARIAMI ate nothing.')

- The defining semantic feature of neg-words is their **non-referential** status: neg-words refer to empty sets
⇒ they resist topicalization
- Cf. similar facts for CLLD in Italian: neg-words cannot undergo CLLD (Alexiadou 2006).

Neg-words: IPrP requirement

(8) a. *Ara-vin* (ar) *č'am-a* *xač'ap'uri* *dghesasc'aul-ze*.
NEG-who NEG eat-AOR.3SG khachapuri party-at
'No-one ate khachapuri at the party.'

b.* *Aravin* *xač'ap'uri* (ar) *č'ama* *dghesasc'aulze*.

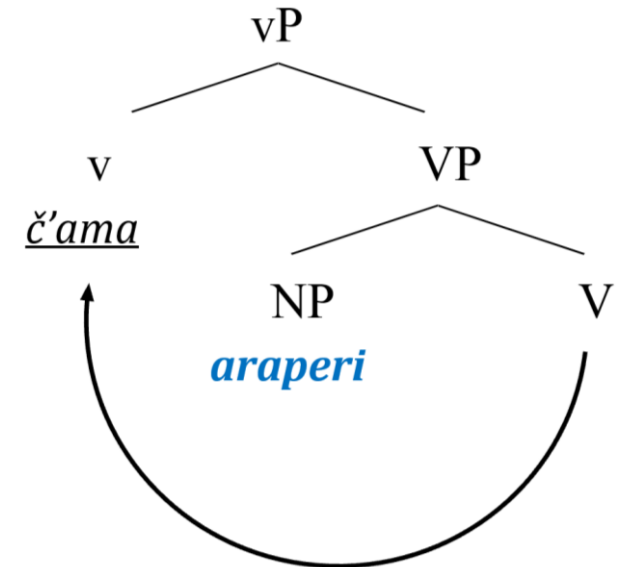
(9) a. *Mariam-ma* *dghesasc'aul-ze* *ara-per-i* (ar) *č'am-a*.
M.-ERG party-at NEG-thing-NOM NEG eat-AOR.3SG
'Mariami didn't eat anything at the party.'

b.* *Mariamamma* *araperi* *dghesasc'aulze* (ar) *č'ama*.

Not a NegP

Direct **object neg-words** (but not other neg-words) can be found postverbally:

- (10) a. % *Mariam-ma ar č'am-a ara-per-i.*
M-ERG NEG eat-AOR.3SG NEG-thing-NOM
'Mariami didn't eat anything at the party.'



- Straightforwardly accounted for: broad-focus **VO** is derived by verb movement; neg-word is in situ
- Evidence against a NegP analysis (Spec-Head configuration).

What this means

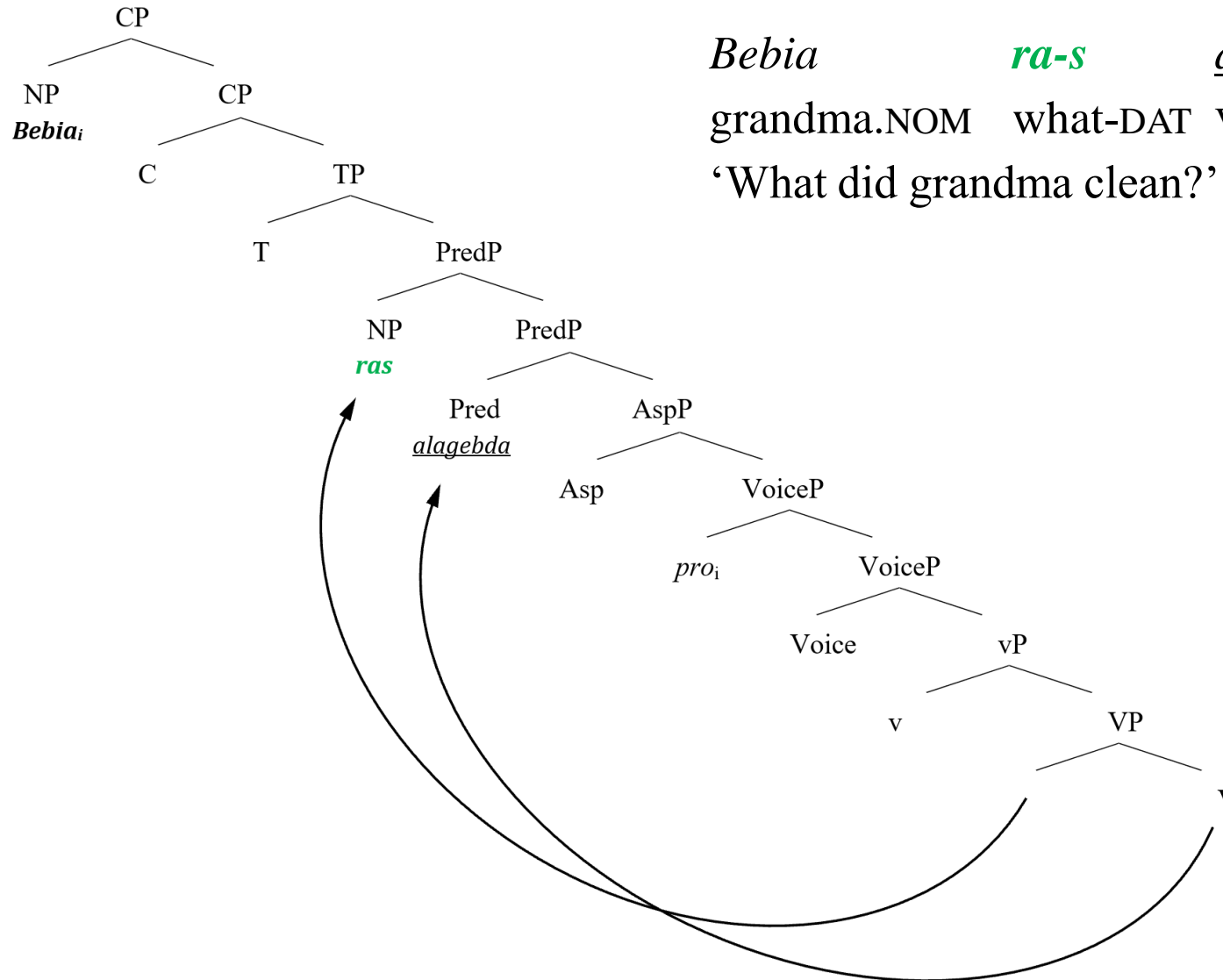
Accordingly, given that

- neg-words in Georgian do not displace into the left periphery, due to their non-referential nature
- neg-words have an IPrP requirement \Rightarrow they cannot be displaced into right periphery
- neg-words are not part of a NegP, where Neg⁰ attracts the verb

\Rightarrow neg-words in Georgian are necessarily found in situ

As such, the **position of neg-words** can be used as a **diagnostic** for the structural status of other constituents, such as wh-phrases and narrow foci.

Wh-question: structure



Bebia *ra-s* *a-lag-eb-d-a?*
 grandma.NOM what-DAT VER-clean-SF-SM-IPFV.3SG
 ‘What did grandma clean?’

Evidence for movement

Wh-question formation obeys **island constraints**:

- (11) * *Marik'a-m i-q'id-a c'ind-eb-i* [_{RC} *romeli-c vin mo-ksov-a*]?
M.-ERG VER-buy-AOR.3SG socks-PL-NOM which-COMP who PRV-knit-AOR.3SG
(Lit.: 'Marika bought the socks that who knitted?')

Weak crossover (WCO) effects are present:

- (12) % *Vin_i a-u-ghc'er-a tavis-ma_i kmar-ma Giorgi-s?*
who PRV-VER-describe-AOR.3SG 3SG.REFL.POSS-ERG husband-ERG G.-DAT
'Who_i did her_i husband describe to Giorgi?'

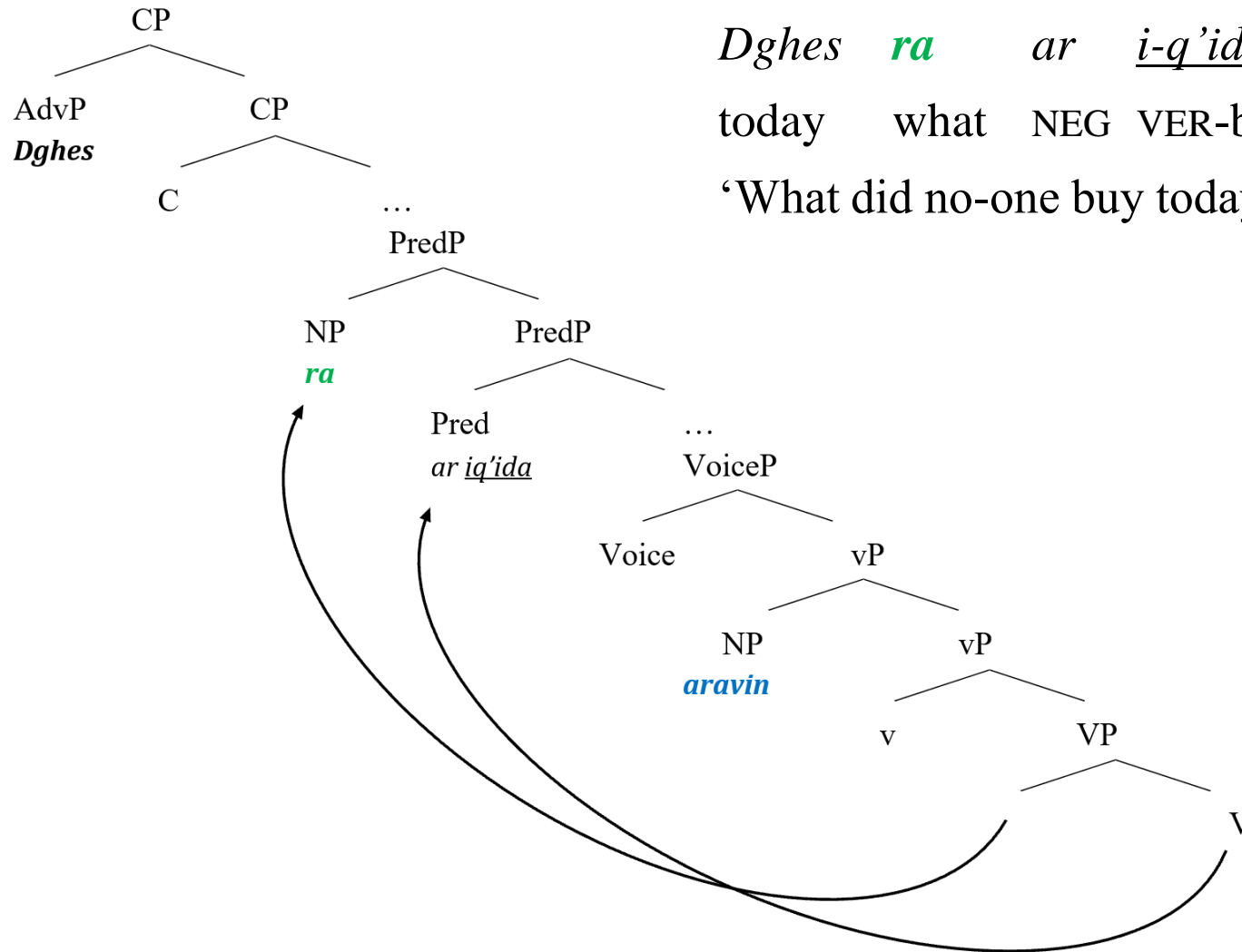
Wh-phrases & neg-words

(13) a. *Dghes* *ra* *ar* *i-q'id-a* *ara-vin?*
today what NEG VER-buy-AOR.3SG NEG-who
'What did no-one buy today?'

b. **Dghes* *ara-vin* *ra* (*ar*) *i-q'id-a?*
today NEG-who what NEG VER-buy-AOR.3SG
(‘What did no-one buy today?’)

Neg-words are in situ ⇒ wh-phrases undergo A-bar movement

Wh-phrases & neg-words



Dghes **ra** *ar* *i-q'ida* **aravin?**
 today what NEG VER-buy-AOR.3SG NEG-who
 'What did no-one buy today?'

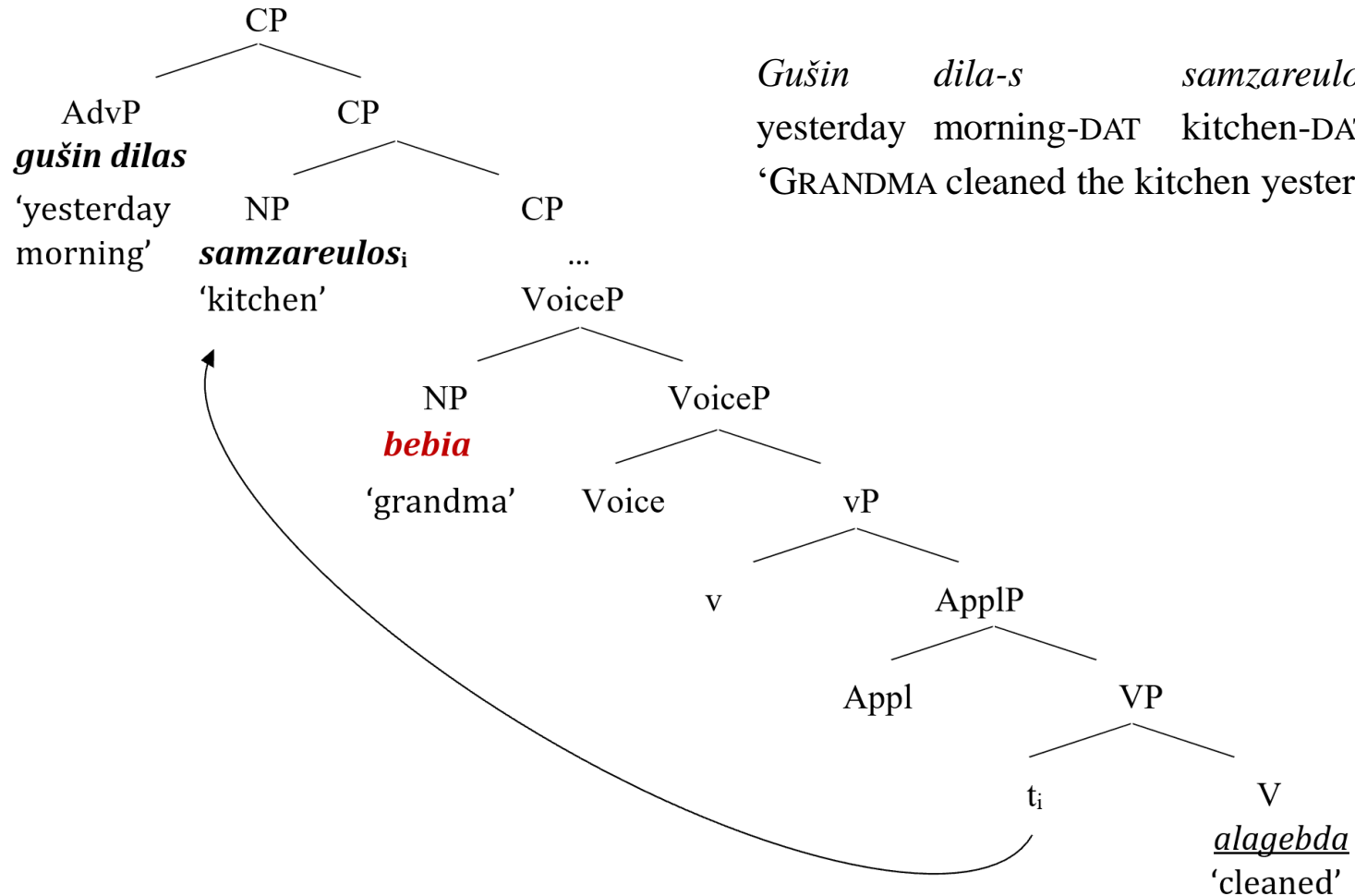
Wh-phrases: landing site

A-bar position at the high boundary of **the verb domain**.

Some evidence:

- In wh-questions with neg-words, the landing site of the wh-phrase is above the subject neg-word
⇒ **above the thematic layer of the clause**
- In embedded wh-questions, wh-phrases obligatorily follow the interrogative complementizer ⇒
below the CP layer (Erschler 2015)

Preverbal narrow foci: structure



Gušin dila-s samzareulo-s bebia a-lag-eb-d-a.
 yesterday morning-DAT kitchen-DAT grandma.NOM VER-clean-SF-SM-IPFV.3SG
 'GRANDMA cleaned the kitchen yesterday morning.'

Narrow foci & neg-words

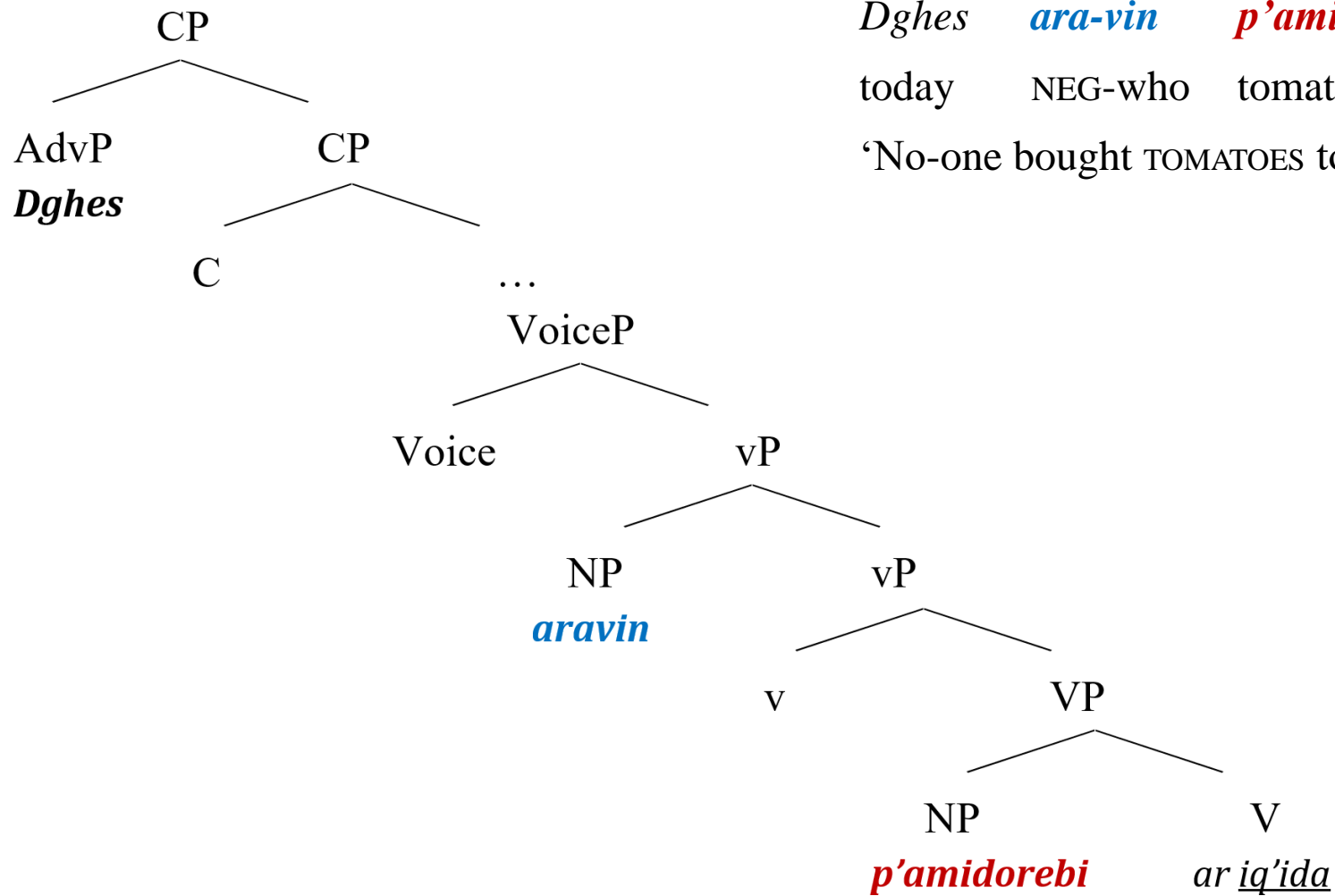
(14) A: *Dghes* ***ra*** *ar* *i-q'id-a* ***ara-vin?***
today what NEG VER-buy-AOR.3SG NEG-who
'What did no-one buy today?'

B: ??? *Dghes* ***p'amidorebi*** *ar* *iq'ida* ***aravin.***
today tomato-PL-NOM NEG VER-buy-AOR.3SG NEG-who
(‘No-one bought TOMATOES today.’)

B': *Dghes* ***ara-vin*** ***p'amidor-eb-i*** *ar* *i-q'id-a.*
today NEG-who tomato-PL-NOM NEG VER-buy-AOR.3SG
'No-one bought TOMATOES today.'

Neg-words are in situ ⇒ narrow focus is within the thematic layer of the clause

Narrow foci & neg-words



Dghes *ara-vin* *p'amidor-eb-i* *ar* *iq'id-a*.
 today NEG-who tomato-PL-NOM NEG VER-buy-AOR.3SG
 'No-one bought TOMATOES today.'

Also possible: $S_F > O_{neg}$

(15) A: *Vin* *ar* *i-q'id-a* *ara-per-i?*
 who NEG VER-buy-AOR.3SG NEG-thing-NOM
 ‘Who bought nothing?’

B: ? *Manana-m* *ara-per-i* *ar* *i-q'id-a*.
 M.-ERG NEG-thing-NOM NEG VER-buy-AOR.3SG
 ‘MANANA bought nothing.’

- Expected if both the focus and the neg-word are in situ ($S_F > O_{neg}$)

But not the other way round ($*O_F > S_{neg}$)

(16) A: *Ra* *ar* *i-q'id-a* *ara-vin?*
what NEG VER-buy-AOR.3SG NEG-who
'What did no-one buy?'

B: **Ghvino* *ara-vin* *ar* *i-q'id-a.*
wine.NOM NEG-who NEG VER-buy-AOR.3SG
(‘No-one bought wine.’)

- Expected if both the focus and the neg-word must be in situ ($*O_F > S_{neg}$)

Conclusion

- Wh-phrases undergo **short movement to Spec, PredP**, accompanied by movement of the verb to Pred⁰.
- Preverbal narrow foci are interpreted **in situ**.
- Evidence from the distribution of neg-words is an important diagnostic in Georgian.
- A single language can utilize **multiple syntactic strategies** in order to achieve adjacency between focus/wh-phrase and the verb.
- Preverbal focus placement is **not a unified phenomenon**.

A close-up photograph of a wall covered in ancient Georgian script. The text is carved into rectangular stone blocks. In the bottom left corner, a person's hand is visible, touching the wall. The text is in a traditional Georgian font, and the overall scene is lit with warm, golden light.

დიდი მადლობა!

Děkuji mnohokrát!